DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 434 983 UD 033 160

TITLE	Wipe Out Vandalism and Graffiti.
INSTITUTION	Department of Justice, Washington, DC. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
REPORT NO	NCJ-171122
PUB DATE	1998-12-00
NOTE	9p.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
JOURNAL CIT	Youth in Action; n2 Dec 1998
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adolescents; Information Dissemination; *Prevention; Program Development; Program Implementation; Secondary Education; *Vandalism; Youth Programs
IDENTIFIERS	*Graffiti

ABSTRACT

This guide discusses starting a project to prevent vandalism and graffiti. It tells students how to get started on a project and suggests some activities young people could organize. These steps are outlined: (1) choose a project; (2) identify resources and make a plan; and (3) recruit and train volunteers. Educating the public is an important part of any project to prevent or reduce vandalism and graffiti. Keeping a project going requires commitment and attention to costs. A final step is evaluating the project so that organizers can know if it has met its goals and can determine how to improve project implementation. (SLD)

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ED 434 983

NATIONAL YOUTH NETWORK

Youth in action

December 1998 NUMBER 02

Wipe Out Vandalism and Graffiti

What Is Vandalism?

Vandalism is the willful destruction or defacement of public or private property. This includes smashing mailboxes, trashing someone's property, drawing graffiti on public places, breaking windows, and destroying abandoned buildings. Vandalism costs schools, homeowners, businesses, youth, and others more than $15 billion a year.

Projects against vandalism and graffiti seek to get rid of, reduce, or repair the willful destruction or defacement of property. Antivandalism activities can include:

- Repairing damage caused by vandalism.
- Educating others about the costs of vandalism.
- Sponsoring a graffiti paintout.
- Organizing the beautification of a plot of land that is piled high with trash.

The activity might be a one-time project or a yearlong effort, depending on your group's interests and resources.

How Does an Antivandalism or Antigraffiti Project Prevent or Reduce Crime?

Intentionally damaging property, public or private, is a crime. Vandalized, graffiti-marked, and messy property generates unease and says to the public that the neighborhood, school, or community is not valued by its residents. It drives up insurance costs and taxes for everyone. Getting rid of vandalism-related damage helps reduce fear, increases public use of the area, restores the appearance of the community, and reassures the victims (including community residents) that people do care about the problem. Quickly removing graffiti from

from the administrator

Vandalism and graffiti are not pranks—they're crimes, and costly ones. That is why it's important that you do what you can to wipe them out in your community. There are several things that can be done. This Bulletin tells you how to get started and suggests some activities you could organize. Working to combat crimes like vandalism and graffiti is a challenge, but it is one that can be met—and as the rewards of a safer community are realized, you will be glad you did your part.

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publicly visible spaces is one of the most effective means of discouraging it.

Educational campaigns help youth and others understand what's wrong with vandalism, how it hurts the community, and why it is a crime. One aspect of vandalism that is rarely realized is the cost of repairing vandalized property. Money that was supposed to go toward extracurricular school activities is often used to repair the destruction caused by vandalism. Youth who understand the effects of vandalism are less likely to vandalize and less likely to tolerate vandalism.

Students in Lexington, KY, worked with school officials to repair and repaint vandalized school bathrooms. Damage dropped dramatically once the new facilities were in place. In North Charleston, SC, students cleaned up graffiti and other damage around the school to help make the neighborhood more attractive. Students in San Antonio, TX, covered a once-vandalized wall with an attractive mural.

Planning a Successful Project

For more information on how to plan a successful project, see the National Youth Network's Planning a Successful Crime Prevention Project. *This 28-page workbook explains the five steps of the Success Cycle:*

- *Assessing Your Community's Needs.*
- *Planning a Successful Project.*
- *Lining Up Resources.*
- *Acting on Your Plans.*
- *Nurturing, Monitoring, and Evaluating.*

The workbook includes six worksheets for you to take notes on. You can get a copy of this planning workbook from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, listed in the Resources section.

What Does It Take To Start an Antivandalism or Antigraffiti Project?

Choose a Project

First you need to choose the approach you'll use. Do you want to educate or repair and restore or both? Before you start your own project, check with local law enforcement organizations, civic associations, Neighborhood Watch groups, and others in the community about antivandalism or antigraffiti efforts that might already be under way. One such example is the Greater D.C. Cares organization, which sponsors Servathon, an annual volunteer day. For Servathon '98, 4,000 volunteers painted, weeded, cleared trash, and removed graffiti at 57 sites around the Washington, D.C., area (*The Washington Post*, May 3, 1998). You may be able to join such a group or work in ways that complement its efforts. You may also be able to share information, materials, or tools.

Educating the Public

If you have decided to educate the public about vandalism and graffiti, you will need to decide on your target audience. Is it your peers in school? Younger students? Adults in the community? What do they already know about vandalism and what do you need to help them learn? How much time can you spend on educating the group? You will need to match your time and resources with the size of the group and the education tasks you want to accomplish.

Repairing Damage

If you've decided to work on repairing damage caused by vandalism, you will need to identify a place, or places, where your group will work. Talk with the property owner (whether a private owner or the local government or school

district) to obtain permission. You might even get an offer of help in the form of paint, brooms, trash bags, or refreshments! Check out organizations that deal with neighborhood beautification in your community. They are often looking for eager volunteers.

In Caldwell, ID, youth and adult volunteers have formed a graffiti removal task force. Run by the Idaho Chamber of Commerce in coordination with the police and other local agencies, the task force keeps graffiti removal equipment at the Chamber's downtown site. As graffiti is spotted in the community, the task force coordinator is alerted. The coordinator immediately calls on volunteers to remove the graffiti. This system has been so successful that the local juvenile court has asked to be able to assign youth to serve with the task force as part of their court-ordered community service for nonviolent crimes.

Identify Resources and Make a Plan

Whatever project your group decides on, you will need to develop a plan of the steps involved in starting your project, carrying it out, and completing it. Identify the resources you'll need—the number of volunteers and the skills they'll need, as well as the materials they will require (such as tools, paints, etc.). Try to collect these resources through donations to keep costs down. Check with hardware and home repair stores, businesses that have their own maintenance staff, school maintenance staffs, and parents to see if they would be willing to donate materials to your project.

Decide as part of the plan how you will measure the success of your project. Will people repeat your antigraffiti or antivandalism message to friends and family? Will the building remain graffiti free for at least 6 months? Will your restored areas (e.g., repaired windows) remain intact?

A Word of Warning

If you are thinking of cleaning up graffiti, be sure to work closely with your local police or sheriff's department. Gang graffiti is used to mark turf and to communicate between gangs. This type of graffiti may contain information that is important to police antigang efforts. You may need to select another site to avoid any potential danger from gang members or to preserve graffiti for police analysis.

Recruit and Train Volunteers

The main ingredient in a successful antivandalism or antigraffiti project is a committed group of volunteers. Once you have gathered volunteers to participate in your project and decided on your specific activities, you will need to provide some training.

Training will make sure that all participants understand the goals and objectives of your project, that they have the skills necessary to perform tasks, and that they know how to handle problems. Training also builds teamwork among your volunteers and develops the skills needed for the success of your project. You will need to plan such details as:

- When and where a training session will take place.
- Contents and procedures of a training session.
- What, if any, additional materials will be needed.

You may also need to enlist the help of such professionals as law enforcement officers, victim assistance professionals, school security staff, trainers from corporations, lawyers, and community volunteer agencies.

Be sure each specific part of the training is planned. This will do much to ensure the success of your effort. Professional trainers know that preparation and organization are

Estimated Training Time for Youth Crime Prevention Projects

Project	*Number of Training Hours*
Community cleanup	*1–4*
Fairs and displays to educate the public	*1–5*
Vandalism prevention	***2–3***
Escort/check-in service for senior citizens	*2–3*
Shoplifting prevention education	*2–4*
Neighborhood Watch	*4–5*
School crime watch	*4–6*
Home security surveys	*4–8*
Plays and puppet programs	*4–10*
Victim/witness assistance	*5–20*
Teen court	*10–120*
Teaching child protection	*16–20*
Counseling of peers or others	*20–30*
Hotlines	*20–30*
Mediation	*25–30*

80 percent of good training. The table above is a guideline of training hours for an anti-vandalism project and other crime prevention projects.

Other Possible Projects

Here are some ideas for projects:

- Work with a Neighborhood Watch group to start a "square mile" or "block by block" program in which youth and others take responsibility for the cleanliness of an area and work with residents to maintain it. Youth in several major cities in England took on these challenges as summer projects.
- Write articles for the school newspaper on the cost of graffiti, its impact on the school budget, and how the courts—juvenile and adult—treat vandalism. Students in Hibbing and Chisholm, MN, wrote public service messages that were later broadcast on local radio stations.
- Start a hotline in cooperation with police and school officials to report vandalism. In some high schools, Crimestoppers, through its Scholastic Crimestoppers program, offers such services.
- Organize a graffiti cleanup crew. Immediately cleaning up graffiti whenever it appears helps the community look better and discourages further vandalism.

What Does It Take To Keep an Antivandalism or Antigraffiti Project Going?

As with any program, continuing to recruit volunteers is very important, especially if your project is a long-term or multi-site one. Also, involving community sponsors who will continue their support throughout the life of the project helps sustain your effort.

As you take care of the most immediate issues of your project, you may want to shift your focus to more long-term solutions. For example, the use of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) means that by making improvements in the physical space near or at your worksite, you may make it less attractive to vandals. Some CPTED methods include:

- Improving the lighting and landscaping of your area.
- Using a different kind of paint that can't easily be covered with graffiti. (A paint specialty store or your school maintenance staff can advise you on the type of paint to use.)
- Installing fences and putting in security cameras.

If you consider some of these CPTED actions, you will have to think about their costs. Many of these strategies can be good investments and reduce future repair costs created by vandalism, but they may require sizable initial investments. These large repairs should most likely be done in partnership with local government or school officials.

What Are Some of the Challenges in Starting an Antivandalism or Antigraffiti Project?

One danger is taking on too much. Be realistic. You and your group of volunteers won't be able to fix or prevent every instance of vandalism, but you can make a substantial difference if you stick to the goals of your project and are persistent. Sometimes graffiti writers come back to a particular site three or four times to see whether you'll keep cleaning it up. Your followthrough will work to defeat them.

Maintaining Interest

Another challenge is keeping volunteers and sponsors interested and involved in the project. This requires ongoing attention. Making cleanup work fun, publicizing the results of your project, helping people build new skills as they work on the project, celebrating your successes, and thanking sponsors and volunteers are all ways to keep them involved in your project. Let local news media—TV stations, radio stations, and community newspapers—know about your project and its activities.

Maintaining Resources

Finding financial resources and support in the community also can be a challenge. Having a clear set of goals and a sound plan for your project will make it more attractive to potential funders and supporters. Thinking of goods and services you need rather than just asking for cash can open doors. Looking for opportunities to borrow equipment rather than buying it can cut your costs. Getting donated studio time to record radio ads is easier and less expensive than renting recording equipment. Asking for volunteers from businesses and schools in your neighborhood expands your group and builds partnerships.

What Are Some of the Rewards of Participating in an Antivandalism or Antigraffiti Project?

One of the most important rewards of your project will be a cleaner, safer neighborhood that is used more by law-abiding residents. A park that was once an eyesore can be cleaned up and recaptured for community use. People in your neighborhood will feel increased pride in their public spaces, and members of your cleanup crew will gain a new sense of self-worth and of their role in the community.

How Can Your Project Be Evaluated?

Evaluating your project can help you learn whether it has met its goals, but only if you decide up front what you want to evaluate and how you will go about doing so. The purpose of conducting an evaluation is "to answer practical questions of decision-makers and program implementors who want to know whether to continue a program, extend it to other sites, modify it, or close it down."[1] You will want to

[1] National Crime Prevention Council, *What, me evaluate?* Washington, DC: National Crime Prevention Council, 1986.

be able to show that your project does one or all of the following:

- Reduces crime.
- Reduces fear of crime.
- Is cost effective.
- Has a lasting impact.
- Attracts support and resources.
- Makes people feel safe and better about being in your school or community.

To evaluate your antigraffiti or antivandalism project, reflect on your original goals. Were graffiti and vandalism reduced in your school or neighborhood? Did you reach all the people in the neighborhood you intended to? Did the message of your project reach other youth? Did they learn what you were trying to teach them? Are young people more aware of the costs and dangers of vandalism and graffiti? Be sure to include an evaluation step in your overall plan. Ask yourself what you can do better to reach your goals, to involve more people in your project, and to spread your messages to a wider audience. Then, make adjustments to your activities to strengthen your project.

Learning to evaluate the things you do is a good skill; one you can apply to all aspects of your life. Good luck with your project and—Go for it!

Resources

For more information, contact one of the following organizations or visit the U.S. Department of Justice Kids Page Web site at www.usdoj.gov/kidspage. This site includes information for kids, youth, parents, and teachers.

Boys & Girls Clubs of America
1230 West Peachtree Street NW.
Atlanta, GA 30309
404–815–5700
404–815–5789 (Fax)
Internet: www.bgca.org

Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse
P.O. Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849–6000
800–638–8736
301–519–5212 (Fax)
Internet: www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm

Keep America Beautiful, Inc.
1010 Washington Boulevard
Stamford, CT 06901
203–323–8987
Internet: www.kab.org

National Crime Prevention Council
1700 K Street NW., Second Floor
Washington, DC 20006–3817
202–466–6272
Internet: www.ncpc.org

Scholastic Crimestoppers
Crimestoppers International
Larry Wieda
4441 Prairie Trail Drive
Loveland, CO 80537
303–441–3327
303–441–4327 (Fax)
Internet: www.c-s-i.org

This Bulletin was produced by the National Crime Prevention Council as part of the National Citizens' Crime Prevention Campaign under a cooperative agreement with the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The National Crime Prevention Council is a nonprofit organization that conducts demonstration and youth-based programs, produces publications and training materials on a variety of subjects, and manages the day-to-day activities of the National Citizens' Crime Prevention Campaign.

Points of view or opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, BJA, or the U.S. Department of Justice.

The National Youth Network, founded and managed by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, consists of diverse youth leaders from across the Nation who are sponsored by youth-serving organizations. The goal of the Network is to recognize and build upon the power and importance of youth leadership by uniting young people and adults, through communication and action, to enable youth organizations and nonaffiliated youth to have a positive, formidable impact in our communities and throughout our Nation.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.

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